



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



Public Hearing – February 9, 2009
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Gina McCarthy
Department of Environmental Protection

Proposed House Bill No. 5281 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE DONATION OF DEER MEAT TO NONPROFIT ENTITIES

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Proposed House Bill No. 5281 - An Act Concerning the Donation of Deer Meat to Nonprofit Entities. Despite the good intentions of the sponsor, the Department does not support the issuance of free deer tags, statewide, as proposed in this bill.

This proposal is detrimental to the DEP's deer management objectives and will not significantly increase the amount of venison donated to charities. In addition, the proposed conditions on the issuance of these tags would be difficult to enforce.

The DEP has established 12 deer management zones (DMZs) to reflect differences in human densities, deer densities, hunter access, and landscape characteristics, all of which affect deer management objectives across the State. The DEP already issues unlimited, free replacement antlerless deer tags in DMZs 11 and 12 (coastal and southwestern Connecticut) where deer populations are overabundant. The DEP has the regulatory authority to designate additional DMZs where free replacement antlerless tags can be issued, if necessary. The harvest of additional deer from some DMZs where deer populations are at or below target levels, could potentially suppress populations further.

The Department is very supportive of initiatives that result in the donation of deer meat to food charities. Since its inception in 1995, the DEP has worked closely with the Hunters for the Hungry Program, a group of volunteer sportsmen who process venison donated by deer hunters and distribute it to food charities. The deer meat is highly valued by the charities and the people they serve. The primary factors affecting venison donations are limited storage capacity and the time and cost of processing the deer. Charities will only accept ground packaged venison. Therefore, hunters who wish to donate deer meat to charities must either process the deer themselves or incur the cost of hiring a professional meat cutter. In addition, many deer are taken early in the season when warm temperatures necessitate that the deer be stored in a cooler or processed quickly. These considerations are significant impediments to hunters wishing to donate venison.

A program, in which participating meat cutters are reimbursed for storing, butchering and grinding venison would increase the amount of venison donated while also serving as an incentive for hunters to remove additional deer from the DMZs that exceed population objectives.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert La France, Legislative Liaison at 424-3401.

Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection PRIVATE LAND DEER AND TURKEY MANAGEMENT ZONE MAP

